

Riverside's A-Calling

Companies and people are moving to Riverside, rthanks in large measure to the new technology oriented business parks in the region.

By Becky Bergman

Amro Albanna was standing around the water cooler chatting with his co-workers one day in 1998 when he learned 14 of his 15 employees commuted to Orange County from Riverside.



Albanna, a Riverside resident himself and company co-founder and president, decided right then and there to shut down the Orange County location and move Applied Digital Solutions closer to everyone's home. Today the wireless telecommunications firm occupies 12,000 square feet in the Riverside University Research Park.

Albanna credits the interests of employee morale and affordable rents to making the move. Nevertheless, he got more than happy workers and cheap digs. He got a built-in labor force eager to find quality jobs.

By moving into the 56-acre research park, part of the larger 856-acre Riverside Regional Technology Park, Albanna put his company within a stone's throw of four colleges and universities, which generate more than 3,800 degrees annually.

Altogether, there are 25 colleges and universities within Riverside and San Bernardino counties and eastern Los Angeles that award more than 20,000 higher education degrees each year, of which 3,000 are in technology-related fields. This provides a sizable pool of technology employees for companies in the region.

"Our location gives us access to students when it comes to hiring time," says Albanna, who adds that his firm employs at least four interns or graduates each year.

"Nothing beats cheap help," says Bob Clark, CEO of Centrum Analytical Laboratory. "We have a good relationship with the university and being here in the park gives us a sense of community."

Albanna, Clark, and others like them typically turn to the local schools – such as University of California, Riverside; Riverside Community College; La Sierra University; and California Baptist University – to fill positions.

Until recently, there was a brain drain in Riverside, says Chris Buydos, who heads up Economic Development and Real Estate Services for the University of California Riverside.

"Students were getting the education they needed, but once they graduated, there was no opportunity to stick around," she says. "The quality jobs they trained for were not here."



PHOTO: SURADO SOLUTIONS

"Many people think that Riverside is in the middle of nowhere, and that's just not true. This is actually a nice community and the connection with the university will help our business."

– Sundip Doshi

Build it, and they will come

The Riverside Regional Technology Park project has turned out to be a win-win situation for everyone involved. The 39-acre University Research Park, for instance, a collaborative effort between the Riverside County Economic Development Agency, the City of Riverside, and UC Riverside, provides tenants with a fiber optic backbone designed to accommodate high-speed voice, data, and video systems for networking.

The property is ideal because it offers easy access to the 215, 60, and 91 freeways and is located less than 20 miles from Ontario International Airport.

So far, four tenants occupy roughly 24,000 square feet in the \$42 million complex. And several companies currently are working with the park to secure space. Surado Solutions recently purchased two-plus acres of the park and will break ground later this year on a 104,000-square-foot facility. Surado CEO Sundip Doshi said he was impressed with the location of the park.

"Many people think that Riverside is in the